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ordinary men, in about the same proportion as we do. However, no matter how much we like natives and their culture, there is always a tendency to assume an ethnic superiority and to look upon a "primitive" man as "just like a child." This assumed mental superiority is part of our thinking and difficult to dislodge.

A "council" of the important old men had gathered under a large tamarind tree on the border of the totem grounds (page 31). Mahkarolla, as one of the older and more important men of the Murngin, had a place in the circle. [I was also present.] The members of this council were discussing the perplexities of the great war in which their various clans were involved. A few months before there had been complete quiet. In the whole of northern Arnhem Land there had been peace. All the old blood feuds were quiet and inactive. The great ceremony to celebrate the recognition of Yurlunggur, the python god, had started. Leaders from the upper reaches of the Roper River had come down to the coastal plains of the Arafura Sea for this great fertility rite.

One night two young men, against the wishes of their elders, killed a boy and wounded another who belonged to clans that had been their traditional enemies. In the early morning the bush people gathered their belongings and hurried back to their own country. The younger men of all the clans of the Murngin and the other tribes made new spears and tested their spear-throwers in preparation for trouble. War started. The ceremonies ceased. Many battles were fought and many people were killed (pages 172-174).

The ceremony which had been interrupted was a fertility rite. Without this celebration to help nature perform her many functions, the animals would not multiply, the grass would not grow, and the seasons of the year would lose their symmetry. The absolute necessity for the celebration of this ritual was felt by all the men who had accepted the responsibilities of Murngin society.

The council had met, therefore, to find ways of stopping the war and of bringing peace to all the clans of the black world as they knew it. The war must be stopped if life were to continue.

The causes of the war were considered in the effort to find a solution which would bring peace to the people. The reasons for the failure of the peace-making ceremonies were considered. Blame was attached to various individuals. The old men criticized especially the hot-headedness of their youths, with slightly more emotion expressed when they spoke of the misdeeds of their enemies' young men.

After several hours of talk consensus was reached. It was felt that the warlike peoples of the bush were really responsible for the trouble. It was

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623 628 clearly seen that those not represented at the conference were the real instigators of the war and that their actions were without tribal sanction.

[202] One old man then suggested sending a messenger with a message stick to the bushmen, who were not represented, to tell them that there would be a great makarata or peace-making ceremony (pages 174-176). Someone replied that this was foolishness for makaratas had been tried and they had failed because the enemies violated the rules. Instead of bringing peace the makaratas had only brought more trouble and greater conflict. Discussion of this point finally brought victory to the one who opposed the makaratas because the antagonism of the coastal people against the inland clans was still very strong and they wanted vengeance as well as peace.

What, then, could be done to stop the fighting? The situation was desperate; drastic efforts must be made. One of the older men said, "Let us stop all war. This killing of our young men is no good. It is better that we have ceremonies all the time and never have war. Let us have a gaingar."

Everyone agreed he was right. The speaker continued, "We will have a spear fight to end all spear fights."

A gaingar is the most deadly form of Murngin warfare. Later I learned that 17 men had been killed in one gaingar. In proportion to the population this meant a higher mortality rate than in all of the battles of World War I. This old man was proposing that today's young men be sacrificed so that the young men of tomorrow could be saved.

I was asked what I thought of the idea. I did not respond for it was too much. I sat there, among a council of the wisest men of a Stone Age culture. In one sense several millenniums separated their civilization from mine. Yet I had been a soldier in a war in which our leaders and those of our allies had said, "This is a war to end all wars," and had sent millions of young men to die with this rallying cry.

The discussion continued. Most of the group were enthusiastically in favor of the gaingar. The minority, Mahkarolla among them, grudgingly agreed.

When the meeting disbanded Mahkarolla and I walked back to my camp. "When I was a boy I saw a spear fight to end all spear fights," he said. "Many men were killed. It was no good. We must not have it. My people did not stop fighting. As you see, we are fighting today just as we did before. Spear fights do not end spear fights."

159 502 E121 184 778 One day Mahkarolla and I started on an expedition with two canoeloads of Murngin men, I to map clan territories, he to visit the sacred pools where his totems lived. As we sailed in the dugout around the rocky cliffs of Point Napier, across the channel from the English Company Islands, we